

Testimony of Eric P. Schwartz  
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Subcommittee on Africa, Global Human Rights and  
International Operations

on UN Peacekeeping Reform:  
Seeking Greater Accountability and Integrity

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I want to thank both the Chair of the Subcommittee, Representative Smith, and the Ranking Minority Member, Representative Payne, for the opportunity to testify on peacekeeping reform. I'm grateful for the opportunity to appear before a body whose leadership has such a distinguished record on international human rights and humanitarian issues. Refugees, victims of torture, those suffering the evils of human trafficking, and others around the world who have been deprived of their rights know they have a tireless ally and advocate in Congressman Smith; and Representative Payne's commitment to human rights, reconciliation and peace in Africa has helped to keep African development issues on the agenda of policy makers here and abroad.

It is not possible to discuss seriously peacekeeping reform without addressing the issue of sexual exploitation and abuse by UN peacekeepers in the Congo and in other UN operations. The attention to this issue by Members of Congress and others is highly appropriate and critically important -- both because ending victimization is a humanitarian imperative, and because an effective policy of zero tolerance is essential to ensuring the future credibility of UN peace operations.

Before turning to a discussion of the UN's response to sexual exploitation and abuse by peacekeepers, let me take a few minutes to explain why the United States needs credible UN peace operations. In short, these operations enable our government to support conflict resolution, political reconciliation and economic reconstruction activities that are important to U.S. national interests, and allow us to do so while relying on other governments to provide the vast majority of military and civilian personnel. For a superpower occupied in so many places around the world, this burden-sharing is of vital importance -- especially as the demands for international involvement in efforts to end conflicts and build stable societies continue to increase.

These demands have largely transformed the nature of peacekeeping over the past 15 years, altering the assumptions that had governed "traditional" peacekeeping until the end of the Cold War. No longer can peacekeepers assume the consent of all parties to the conflict; no longer are they assigned only the narrow tasks of monitoring ceasefires and border disengagement agreements between states; and no longer are they limited to the use of force solely in self-defense. In fact, the United States and other members of the UN Security Council now regularly ask peacekeepers and their civilian counterparts to remake societies coming out of internal conflict -- to help negotiate peace agreements, reform security sectors, promote political reconciliation and effective and democratic governance, and rebuild systems of justice. Moreover, in the absence of indigenous capacity, UN troops and international civilian police have been asked to ensure public security in post-conflict environments, deter and respond to threats of violence, and mentor and train local security forces.

As Members of Congress are well aware, this transformation in peacekeeping has not been an easy one, and has been accompanied by some tragic failures on the part of the UN and its member states. In Bosnia and Rwanda, for example, mass killings took place notwithstanding the presence of UN peacekeepers. The causes of these two disastrous chapters in the history of UN peacekeeping have been described in detail by many analysts, but in both cases, local populations had legitimate expectations of protection while key UN member states were unprepared to assist or equip peacekeepers to address threats to civilians. In other cases, such as Sierra Leone and East Timor, rebels effectively challenged peace agreements, peacekeepers and other UN officials, and local inhabitants were subjected to vicious attacks resulting in large-scale loss of life. Nonetheless, there have also been positive developments since the end of the Cold War. In Namibia, Cambodia, Kosovo and other operations, UN peacekeepers -- or UN civilian missions serving with green helmeted "coalitions of the willing" -- have helped to provide stability and promote economic and political development. Moreover, the UN Secretariat and UN member states have learned and implemented important lessons over the years. For example, in Sierra Leone and East Timor, UN missions were substantially strengthened and -- as a result -- have helped to provide stability and hope to the citizens of both countries.

The key point is that the United States and other Security Council members will continue to ask UN peacekeepers to take on tough jobs that others are unprepared to tackle. To cite just one example close to home, the UN's peace operation in Haiti is characteristic of many of the contemporary challenges. The mission is mandated "to ensure a secure and stable environment within which the constitutional and political

process in Haiti can take place.” This means having the authority, will and capability to launch attacks on police outposts being occupied by armed opposition elements, conduct security sweeps throughout Port-au-Prince neighborhoods engulfed in violence and criminality, and take on responsibilities for security sector reform. It is worth emphasizing that the Bush administration has strongly endorsed this robust security role for peacekeepers in Haiti, as it has supported robust mandates elsewhere, from Liberia, to Burundi to the Congo. It is no surprise that administration support for these operations has coincided with administration statements and policies in recent years indicating its general view that “failed states matter” -- that poverty, political instability and the absence of effective and accountable government abroad can create serious threats to United States interests at home. And of course, these characteristics of state failure are common to so many countries that are now hosting UN peace operations.

But if we continue to demand that UN peacekeepers engage in a broad range of robust security activities, and that UN humanitarian and development agencies undertake ambitious post-conflict reconstruction missions, then we must do much more to enhance capacities if we wish to ensure substantial success. The alternatives -- to consign the United Nations to future failures, or to reduce dramatically the United Nations' role in efforts to build stable societies -- are not acceptable.

This means that the UN, with strong U.S. support, must develop 1) doctrine that recognizes the need for capable forces in the new security environments in which peacekeepers are mandated to operate; 2) strategies that integrate economic and political development requirements with the need for security; and 3) a commitment to pre-

mission assessments, and strategic mission plans that precede deployments and are drafted by senior-level mission strategy groups brought together prior to missions.

It means that UN members, especially from the developed world, must increase the availability of troops for peacekeeping operations. The United States should upgrade substantially its participation in the United Nations' Stand-by Arrangements System, a voluntary process in which governments express their willingness to make troops and other capabilities available to peace operations. The Department of Defense should be requested to prepare policy options for greater U.S. support of capacity enhancements, and for involvement in peace operations that meet U.S. national interests. Of the some 60,000 UN troops deployed around the world at the end of March, only about 30 were U.S. soldiers. While nobody expects that U.S. troops will be regularly deployed to UN peace operations in large numbers, the administration can certainly identify ways to develop more meaningful engagement. Finally, the United States should sustain and strengthen its support for regional peacekeeping capacity-building efforts, such as the Global Peace Operations Initiative (GPOI).

It is also important to emphasize the critical need to enhance UN capacity for post-conflict peace-building activities. Congress should support the Secretary General's recommendations for a Peace-building Commission, a Peace-building Support Office, and a Peace-building Support Fund. I would also encourage increased funding for the peace operation-related activities of the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights and the United Nations' Electoral Assistance Division.

Finally, to enhance U.S. ability to support post-conflict reconstruction and to coordinate its efforts with the United Nations and other governments, the United States

should strengthen the new State Department Office of Reconstruction and Stabilization, and Congress should provide it with resources necessary -- and requested by the administration for FY '06 -- to play its coordination role.

Let me now move to the issue of sexual exploitation and abuse by peacekeepers. As members are aware, the Secretary General asked Prince Zeid Ra'ad Zeid Al-Hussein, the Jordanian Ambassador to the United Nations, to advise him on this issue and prepare a public report with recommendations. Ambassador Zeid is a highly respected and knowledgeable official, whose career has included service in the Jordanian army and on the UN civilian staff in the Balkans. His report describes a range of shortcomings, including a "mosaic" of rules and regulations that create a lack of clarity; the absence of a system-wide commitment to investigation and, as appropriate, punishment of members of military contingents; the absence of local enforcement capability for investigation and prosecution of civilian members of UN missions; lack of resources, personnel and procedures for effective investigations, training, and interaction with local populations; and absence of redress or compensation for victims. Finally, without seeking to excuse sexual exploitation and abuse, the report notes that absence of organized recreational activities for troops can contribute to aberrant and unacceptable behavior.

In recent weeks, committees of the General Assembly have endorsed in principle the bulk of recommendations made by Ambassador Zeid to address these issues, including measures to ensure uniform standards for all civilian and military participants in peace operations; training programs; increased deployment of women in peacekeeping operations; deployment of established units to peacekeeping operations (which are generally better disciplined than "patched together" units); accountability of senior

managers; effective data collection and management; staffing increases to enhance supervision; and organized recreational activities for peacekeepers.

As reflected in a report of the Secretary General issued last week, the real challenge will be in funding and implementation, and the Congress should support necessary increases in both assessed and voluntary contributions for these and other initiatives. Moreover, Members of Congress should press for implementation of key reforms that might be particularly challenging to implement fully, including 1) independent investigative capacity; 2) commitments by all troop contributing countries to pursue investigations and, as appropriate, prosecutions of members of their militaries when there are well-founded allegations of sexual exploitation or abuse; 3) measures to ensure that United Nations civilian staff and experts on mission are not effectively immune from prosecution due to lack of a functioning judicial system in the host state; and 4) effective programs of victims' assistance even when neither the victim nor the United Nations is able to obtain redress from the perpetrator of the abuse.

UN Secretariat officials have recognized the importance of vigorous action, and many UN member governments say they are ready to endorse real reform. At the same time, there is a difference between agreement in principle by a government and a willingness, for example, to support or pursue prosecutions against one's own nationals. Thus, the administration must ensure this issue remains a high priority in the months and years to come.

In conclusion, I'd like to offer a word about the nature of congressional legislation on UN reform. My views on this issue are informed by a variety of my own prior professional experiences: at the National Security Council, where I was responsible for

United Nations issues; at the United Nations itself; and at the House Foreign Affairs Subcommittee on East Asian Affairs, where I managed humanitarian issues of great concern to United Nations agencies.

I believe the Congress has a critical role to play in encouraging improvements in UN peace operations. But I would respectfully urge that reform legislation not include withholding of assessed contributions to the peacekeeping or regular budget of the United Nations, for several reasons. First, throughout the world, the administration is asking peacekeepers to lighten the load of the United States in substantial ways. And we are doing this in places where our interests and historical associations could reasonably create legitimate expectations of much greater U.S. involvement -- including the deployment of U.S. troops. In Haiti and Liberia, for example, there are very large UN peacekeeping missions, but no U.S. ground troops as part of the operations. Under these sorts of circumstances, there would be something incongruous about withholding U.S. support to UN peacekeeping activities.

Second, by withholding assessed contributions, we risk depriving the institution of the critical resources needed to advance key reforms, including those related to accountability in general and the prevention of sexual exploitation and abuse in particular.

Third, by fully meeting our obligations, we will strengthen the position of those member states and those Secretariat officials -- of whom there are many -- who are deeply committed to positive change. Withholding assessments risks weakening their position, playing into the hands of governments and others who argue that the UN is



already far too willing to accept the dictates of Washington, and undermining the prospects for genuine reform.

To be sure, some Members of Congress may still believe a withholding strategy is necessary -- not to persuade the UN Secretariat or other governments of the importance of reform, but rather to send a strong signal to the Bush administration about pursuing change aggressively. I hope, however, that administration officials will make the case that they are already deeply committed to improvements related to policy, management and accountability, and do not need the threat of withheld assessments to spur them to action. The best approach is for the administration to work cooperatively with the Congress to ensure effective reforms, while sustaining support for UN activities that are critical not only to international peace and security, but also to U.S. national interests.